10 September 2008

Original: English

Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2008

Draft report

Rapporteur: Mr. Yury G. **Yaroshevich** (Belarus)

IV. Impact of the capital master plan, accelerated strategy IV, on meetings held at Headquarters and other issues during its implementation

Introduction and overview

1. At its 492nd meeting, on 8 September 2008, the Committee on Conferences considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on pattern of conferences concerning the impact on meetings held at Headquarters during the implementation of the capital master plan, strategy IV (phased approach) (A/63/119, paras. 59-65). The accelerated strategy for the implementation of the capital master plan would shorten the overall time needed for the renovation but, in so doing, would increase the potential for disruption. While sufficient conference facilities would be available to accommodate all core activities of the intergovernmental bodies normally meeting at Headquarters, on a temporary basis fewer facilities would be available for parallel meetings sometimes held by calendar bodies outside of their mandated entitlement, as well as side events that are customarily organized alongside calendar meetings. The staff of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management would be scattered across five separate locations and current provisions for the accommodation of temporary staff were inadequate. That situation could affect the Department's ability to deliver all mandated outputs in a timely fashion at times of peak demand.

2. A related and as yet unresolved issue was the additional staffing needs for information technology support services, which would be expected to ensure that over a dozen mission-critical systems in multiple locations performed as required throughout the renovation process. In that connection, the Committee was urged to impress upon the General Assembly the need for sufficient numbers of permanent Professional staff for the Information and Communications Technology Section during the upcoming critical period.

08-50269 (E)

Discussion

3. Delegations stressed that the implementation of the accelerated capital master plan must not have any negative impact on the quality and availability of conference services or the equal treatment and working conditions of language services in all six official languages. Concern was expressed regarding the fire doors and barriers which had been installed in the General Assembly Building and the Secretariat Building without consulting Member States. This did not appear to be a rational use of resources given the imminent launch of the plan's construction phase. Several delegations asked whether those doors were in compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as they made entry and exit from conference rooms and common areas of the buildings more difficult. Concern was also expressed that the "Cool United Nations" initiative, whereby the temperature within the Secretariat and Conference Buildings had been raised for a six-week period as a measure to reduce the Organization's greenhouse gas emissions, had subjected both delegations and staff to unacceptable working conditions. Consultations with Member States prior to taking such an initiative might have elicited suggestions on other means to reduce emissions while not adversely affecting working conditions.

4. Members of the Committee also wished to know: (a) if the 750 staff of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management scheduled to move to the Albano Building at 305 East 46th Street represented the entire staff of the Department; (b) the projected date of transfer to the swing space; and (c) the criteria applied in determining which meetings were included in the category of core activities. More detailed information was also requested on the financial implications for conference services of associated costs of the capital master plan.

5. In response, a representative of the Capital Master Plan Office said that the decision to install the fire doors had been taken by the Department of Management and the Department of Safety and Security in consultation with the host country authorities, not by the Office. The purpose of the doors was to provide containment in the event of a fire, since neither the Secretariat nor the General Assembly Buildings currently had a sprinkler system. Although lacking in aesthetic appeal and not user-friendly, the doors met the accessibility standards established in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

6. The Secretary-General had instituted the "Cool United Nations" initiative not as a cost-saving measure, but to lead by example in the effort to combat climate change.

7. The 750 staff members moving to the Albano Building represented the entire documentation chain, from submission through text processing. The move was currently scheduled for the first quarter of 2009. Other Department staff would be located in the DC-1 and DC-2 Buildings, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) Building and at other locations within the United Nations campus during the construction phase. The most complete list of core activities available was the calendar of conferences. Delegations were informed that it might not be possible to accommodate all side events and parallel activities surrounding the meetings listed therein. It was possible that, by limiting side events, space could be made available for meetings of regional groups.